

CHAPTER 5

HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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By the end of this chapter the learner should be able to:

- Define the word higher education
- Discuss the development of higher education in Africa
- Highlight five solutions of the challenges facing higher education in Africa.

DEFINITION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The term higher education has many definitions in scholarly and policy documents. The definition may vary from country to country. At times, in history you may find the definition has varied depending on the level of educational development of a particular country. In Kenya currently the term higher education encompasses all courses of study that lead to the award of an advanced diploma, first or higher level degree. It simply means an education given beyond primary and secondary school. It can also be used to refer to a wide variety of non-university and university post secondary institutions, which act as avenues for advanced skills and knowledge development. These include universities, colleges, institutes and higher vocational and professional institutions.

DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

University education or higher education in Africa is relatively new. Attempts to develop higher education institutions in both English and French speaking countries of Africa started after the Second World War. These institutions were deliberately modelled on the universities

in France and England. Indeed they were to emulate the universities of former colonial powers and hence were closely linked to the mother institutions in Europe which were responsible for final discussions on curricula and content. In the British colonies, the university colleges entered in special relation with university of London under the supervision of the inter-University Council for higher education in the colonies. In the French colonies, universities were established under a decree of the French Ministry of National Education creating French universities overseas. the decrees specified that the universities were to be governed by the statutes which governed other universities of France. In a nut shell it may be observed that colonial higher education institutions were established to promote cultural superiority of the colonial powers in Africa.

At independence universities were among other roles expected to produce highly skilled manpower so as to transform socially and economically the new nations. Though university education has developed significantly since independence, there are notable shortcomings. Universities have been rather slow in breaking away from dependence from the curricula of their former colonial masters. Consequently the relevance of some degree programmes is doubtful and has increasingly drawn criticism. Universities have failed to adapt to a large extent to the African environment. In their development universities in Africa face several challenges.

CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

The enrolment rates in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world. Enrolments growth rates have been slow and the absolute gap by which it lags behind other regions has increased rapidly. More over the gender disparity has traditionally been wide and remain so. Notwithstanding increased awareness of the potential and necessity of women to be mainstreamed into the development process, their access to higher education has increased marginally since the 1980s. Imbalances in gender representation are even worse within the academic and administrative staff of African universities. Their participation ranges from 4 % to 7 % at universities in Burkina faso, Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda to 26 % in Madagascar and Mozambique. Moreover equity issues are prevalent where higher education is a preserve of the rich while the

poor are unable to access due to the exorbitant fees that is required both in private and public universities.

There is an acute shortage of unemployment in most African countries. This can be attributed to weak links between the industry and the universities. This is further compounded by weak curriculum that stresses theory rather than the skills competencies leading to, massive graduates' unemployment. This is due to the mismatch between educational programmes those tertiary institutions offers and the needs of the labour market and the prevailing trade and investment strategies. For example Mozambique reports few places for student and poor quality of the courses. The high cost of tertiary education, means that many potential candidates cannot attend. As a result less than three percent of the nationals public administration staff has received higher education.

Poverty has affected higher education in various ways. Malawi reports difficulties with inadequate boarding facilities, while Mauritania has problems stemming from overcrowding in Campuses. In South Africa lack of funding is a major problem and state sponsored financial assistance to students has gone on decreasing. Eligible but financially needy students continue to be excluded from South Africa higher education. More than 16000 students failed to access government funds in 2009. The scheme that has assisted more than one million students since 2000 has been allocated approximately R.3.3 billion for the 2010 academic year. The main issue is whether the universities will be able to allocate a larger pool of funding. The figures of the students in South Africa denied access to financial aid had risen by 45 percent from 11,120 in 2008 to 16,172 in 2009.

In Kenya lack of funds has affected the admission of new students. The new proposal by the government of reducing funding to the universities expected to worsen the situation if implemented. There has been an increase in the number of students enrolled in public universities to 143,000 in 2010 from 101,000 in 2009. The government has been unable to bankroll universities to the required levels because of the widening budget deficit that has hit US \$2 billion in 2010. The below target in government revenue in a challenging economic environment has made the matter worse. Since Kenyan public universities rely on state funding, failure to keep up with the enrolment growth would undermine the expansion plans.

In Zimbabwe the exorbitant fees charged students has forced many to drop out of higher education. Due to inflation of the local currency, students are forced to pay fees pegged on US dollars, South African Rand and the Botswana Pulas. Many students are struggling to raise foreign currency that was adopted as the legal tenders to replace Zimbabwe dollar when it was rendered unusable by ravaging inflation. The foreign aid that used to support higher education was stopped as a means of sanctioning the Mugambes' government that was accused of human rights violation.

In some countries prevailing laws/legislation often hamper efforts to increase higher education enrolments and improve teaching quality. In some countries highly centralized policy making on Higher Education restricts the autonomy of universities and politicise them. Policy centralization makes it difficult for universities to be responsive to changes in knowledge, labour market and economic development. In other countries, lack of centralization and system oversight allow mushrooming of private universities that provide low quality education at high cost. In comparative perspective Tanzania, Cameroon and Madagascar are examples of countries where government supervise many aspects of university operations. In Benin and Tanzania the government appoints senior university managers. The Ministry of education in Madagascar appoints all faculty members, set salaries and determines working conditions, which results in close links between the faculty members and political system. In other countries such as Angola Guinea and Liberia the public institutions are allowed legal autonomy and even encouraged the establishment of private institutions. For example Kenya has laid down steps in the registration of private university to recognition and accreditation. In South Africa, all private providers are required to register their institutions and apply for accreditation for their programmes with the South Africa Qualification Authority. Zimbabwe has clearly set out the conditions for the establishment of private universities. There are instances where a good number of private institutions are not registered and recognised yet they operate and attract students. For example in Cameroon many private institutions of higher learning operate and are not authorised to do so, as they do not meet the requirements regarding infrastructure, equipments and staffing stipulated by the government. There are many similar cases in other countries. This scenario can be blamed on inadequacies in the

legal provision for the establishment of private universities. Furthermore the employment market recognises training provided and certificates issued by these institutions.

As far as quality is concerned, inadequate mastery of education programmes, the application of rigid teaching practices, lack of teaching materials and insufficient teaching time are some of the factors hindering achievements of objectives of quality education. Among the reasons that could explain the inadequate learning outcomes in the region are the shortages of teachers, resulting in overcrowded classes with pupils teacher ratio that can be as high as 70:1 or even 100:1. Lecture halls are overcrowded, while laboratories and library facilities are insufficient and the living conditions are precarious. There is rapid expansion of enrolment in Higher education institutions and in most cases has led to decline in quality since it was not matched with commensurate increase in funding. In addition some of the private higher education institutions being established are profit oriented with little regard for quality. In a dozen of countries government response has been to establish quality assurance agencies. Due to lack of requisite capacity and financial resources to do the work, they have too often been reduced to agencies for the licensing of higher private institutions. Well over half of the African countries have yet to establish any mechanism for quality assurance. There is poor preparation of students at lower levels, leading to low internal and external inefficiencies at the higher education levels. This further impact on the insufficient development of the country, poverty reduction and lack of improvement of other levels of the education system. The output of academic research in Africa also remained weak. For example in 1995 the region was responsible for just 5,839 published academic papers. The use of ICT continues to be relatively low. Academically the higher education institutions are unable to cope with the new changes that are global and technological. More over the individual scholars are not ready to embrace new ICT skills required in their teaching. This is further compounded by inadequate training and research conditions and low scholarly incentives; there is a strong temptation for many among the brightest students and teaching staff to seek better living conditions in other countries or regions. Approximately 30 % of the African university trained professionals leave the continent for greener pastures. Recent estimates suggest that up to 50,000 Africa trained

PhDs are working outside Africa. The problem is especially acute among medical professionals. There is the challenge of rising demand and access and the struggle to raise and maintain quality and relevance. This can be attributed to slow response to change, inadequate financial resources to expand facilities that affect access.

HIV/AIDS is manifesting itself in lowering of the quality as a result of the deterioration of educational provision and of education systems, the psychological conditions faced by both teachers and students and declining capacity for planning and management. For example in 2004 over 40% of teachers in Zambia were HIV positive. This is clear illustration of the magnitude of the problem that the education sector has to contend with.

Brain drain has affected most of the sub Saharan Africa where most of the skilled labour force immigrates to the developed countries. The percentage of higher education educated migrants in the region increased from 23% in 1990 to 31.4% in 2000. Most of the emigrants are attracted abroad by the quality and status attached to Higher education institutions in those countries. After completing their studies very few return home to apply their new skills.

Higher education has become more competitive especially given the increasing private sector participation, increasing demand for accountability, limited public funding for higher education, and the advent of borderless tertiary education. Competition in the developed world is forcing some institutions to seek new, easy to access markets in developing countries. Some have established their satellite campuses, or are partnering with local institutions in developing countries to offer their degree programs in areas that have ready markets, e.g., business management and information technology. In view of the perceived greater recognition and marketability of foreign degrees, and the certainty of completing the degree within a prescribed period of time without the fear of interruption due to student crises, these 'name brand degrees' are becoming increasingly popular, posing a rising challenge for local universities in some countries.

SUGGESTED SOLUTION

Except in very few cases, the Government largely funds public Higher education. As a result, Ministries responsible for Higher Education

exercise control over how the funds are being applied. If universities are to thrive in this rapidly changing global environment, they need to be able to respond quickly to change and to be accountable for their actions. Thus, while public funding remains important and necessary, the need for further changes in the way tertiary institutions are governed and managed is becoming increasingly clear. How this will be done must be determined by each country itself, taking into account local circumstances. This means, however, that the funding regime has to change as well. One possible way is to use block funding and give the institutions the freedom to decide on how to apply the funds, while holding them accountable for their decisions. But for this to happen, higher education institutions must convince their governments and society that they provide good educational value for money. They need to demonstrate accountability for their actions, to work constantly towards higher internal efficiency, and to market themselves actively within the nation and beyond. Professional management and effective quality assurance and accreditation systems is key to achieving this. But as stated above, the capacity to carry out quality assurance is weak. We need to reflect on how to strengthen quality assurance capacity in a cost-effective manner.

In the current world there is a shorter Knowledge Life Cycles. Knowledge doubles every 3-5 years depending on the discipline. Recently, some predictions suggest that by 2020, it will double every 75 days or so. To keep pace with such an extraordinary rate of development, a graduate will require continuous learning in order to maintain professional proficiency. In other words, a knowledge-based worker will find it necessary to earn the equivalent of several degrees in his/her lifetime through self-learning. Thus, graduates will need to keep tending their stock of knowledge and updating their skills and competencies so that their knowledge and skills can remain relevant and competitive. A new type of university that caters for this clientele is emerging.

Other solutions involve the development of Domestic graduate education programs as the solution for training future academic staff to the PhD level. At least for an initial period, this may require strong partnerships with other universities (both in the south and the north) as capacity for local research and supervision is likely to be limited. There is need to create favourable climate for staff retention by addressing the concerns, changing the approach to staff training, and allowing staff

to use their skills in a transparent and managed manner to supplement their income. There is need to work together in global partnerships and regional cooperation by maintaining strategic partnerships and advance competitive positions. The small size of African economies cannot support the creation of a sufficient number of world-class tertiary institutions to meet the demand in each country. Regional collaboration helps to achieve economies of scale, especially for capital intensive and highly specialized disciplines in the sciences, engineering and medicine. In addition, maintaining adequate levels of educational quality and relevance requires active and sustainable access to global knowledge through professional interchanges, library resources, or joint research opportunities. Strong partnerships with other tertiary institutions around the world, when supported by modern information and communications technologies, make this increasingly possible.

The government of Botswana has embarked on a major policy decision taken within the health sector that has assisted in cushioning the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the provision of free Anti-Retroviral Therapy to all citizens. This has assisted in curtailing the problem of teacher absenteeism and teacher mortality associated with the AIDS problem. Tackling teacher absenteeism and mortality is a crucial strategy in the quest to attain quality in education; there is a need to ensure that qualified teachers are retained. The provision of free Anti-Retroviral Therapy has helped Botswana to preserve its teaching force in all sectors of her education system. The huge financial investment that Botswana has put in the provision of Anti-Retroviral Therapy has assisted in saving lives and sustaining the critical workforce needed to support the economy. Other policy issues involve infusion/integration of HIV/AIDS education into the curriculum. This has been made mandatory for all education levels, primary to tertiary. The infusion of issues dealing with sexual reproductive health into the curriculum represents a major innovation in the education system, given that the discussion of such issues has always been a taboo in African culture. Further the policy has prescribed the incorporation of guidance and counseling into the teacher training programmes and discouraged discrimination against those children and teachers infected or affected by the disease; they are to be allowed to stay in the school regardless of their status. The experience of Botswana can provide a good lesson for other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa where the teaching

population continues to be decimated by AIDS. It is equally true that not many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa can afford to provide free Anti-Retroviral Therapy to their citizens.

ACTIVITY

- i. Identify and discuss four major challenges affecting higher education in Africa.
- ii. Suggest possible ways of enhancing performance in higher education in Africa.
- iii. Discuss how poor governance has stifled the development of Higher education in Africa.
- iv. Suggest ways in which universities in Africa may be made creators of employment.
- v. Identify some of the challenges that has made African universities unable to move out of the “colonial shell”.

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